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ENGLISH LITERATURE.

The Mind of Tennyson. His Thoughts on God, Freedom, and Immortality. By E. HERSHEY SNEATH, Ph. D., Professor of Philosophy in Yale University. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1900. 12mo, pp. 189.

The study of philosophy should precede and accompany advanced work in English literature. Not only is such study admirable for training in analysis and valuable for mental discipline and intellectual equipment, but it has positive usefulness. The whole subject of æsthetics, on which much of literary criticism is necessarily founded, comes under the general domain of philosophy. To study intelligently the various theories of poetry, of the drama, and even of the novel, an acquaintance with the main problems of philosophy, and with the chief modern philosophical writers, is well-nigh indispensable. Furthermore, as literature is the immortal part of history, and the interpretation of life, so a knowledge, however meagre, of the history of philosophy, which is simply the history of human thought, affords the best possible foundation for the study of the development of literary forms. Many nineteenth century writers cannot be understood in detail without some familiarity with the main ideas set forth in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*; and how valuable to the student of literature is an acquaintance with Schopenhauer's *World as Will and Idea*, is known only to those specialists in English who have read and pondered over that stimulating book. It is quite possible that much of our present training of graduate students in English, students who will soon be teachers, is a trifle too narrow; and nothing can broaden their views of art and life and give them what some of them seem to lack—a stock of interesting ideas—more effectively than the pursuit, as an avocation, of the highways of philosophical thought.

All his life long Tennyson was an enthusiastic student of philosophy. Although not an original thinker himself, and possessing what seems to some of us, at any rate, a rather commonplace mind, his poetry, as everyone is willing to admit, reflected with astonishing faithfulness the current thought of his age, which

means that he turned his reading to good account, and by his remarkable genius for poetic expression, transformed the dry bones of philosophy into the most beautiful living forms of verse. Therefore a study of Tennyson by a professional student of philosophy, and a study entirely from the philosophical point of view, is wholly welcome. Prof. Sneath says in his preface,

"The aim of this little book is to interpret and systematise Tennyson's thoughts on God, Freedom, and Immortality. Great care has been taken not to force the interpretation in any manner, but to determine as nearly as possible just what the poet thought on these 'inevitable questions.' To this end special effort has been made to distinguish between the subjective and objective,—the personal and impersonal,—in his poetry; also, to make due allowance for metaphor and poetic license. The interpretation has, of course, been made in the light of Tennyson's relation to the spirit of his age."

The promise made in this preface is faithfully kept, both from the positive and negative point of view. The author, with the possible exception of page 150, where he interprets part xlviii of *In Memoriam* as positive affirmation rather than mere poetic imagination, never forces Tennyson to say anything that the language of the poet does not justify: he draws theories from the language, and does not try to make the language fit the theories. This is one of the chief merits of the book. Again, Prof. Sneath sticks to his subject closely, something that all philosophical writers do not always accomplish; he is never tempted away from his subject into the enticing fields of purely literary and artistic criticism, preferring to leave that to the hundreds of books and essays where it has been and will be fully treated.

The book has a short general introduction, and is then divided into three chapters dealing with the three great affirmations of the so-called practical reason, God, Freedom, and Immortality. On these three subjects the author shows that Tennyson followed strictly the Kantian philosophy, or in other words the enlightened religious thought of the nineteenth century—that these three postulates are forever beyond the possibility of knowledge and demonstration, but are articles of faith, *noumena*, realities which transcend phenomena of sense,

and are grasped by the practical reason. Though we cannot know them, we may believe them, and Tennyson elects to do so. The objection might immediately be raised that any thoughtful reader of Tennyson would know his general position anyway, hence why write a book on the subject? If the object of Prof. Sneath's book were merely to find out the poet's ultimate religious and philosophical attitude, this objection would be valid, and the book be at once condemned as superfluous; but the author's object is to "interpret and systematise." He takes the poems in their chronological order, and clearly shows how Tennyson developed, and how different his final attitude was from his earliest position. The book may fairly be called, then, an addition to our knowledge of Tennyson's works, and is thus an important aid to students and teachers of English.

And it happily differs from many philosophical treatises in being utterly unpretentious in style. It is as free from *ex cathedra* utterances as it is from the smell of the lamp. Its method is the method of simple inquiry; nothing is taken for granted, and the separate steps by which each conclusion is reached are so evident that he who runs may read. The introduction, giving a review of the philosophical skepticism, and the doubts of the age against which Tennyson had to struggle, is a model of clearness in style and simplicity of treatment. The fact that Tennyson, who was "an artist before he was a poet," did not believe in art for art's sake, is well demonstrated. His chief aim as a poet was an ethical one, and he felt keenly the responsibility of his gift, and the necessity for making a proper use of it. Under no circumstances could such a man have remained silent on the great religious questions that interested his age; but, as Prof. Sneath points out, he was especially drawn to them by three things: his own mental struggles, which seem to have begun at the University, the scientific skepticism that was in the very atmosphere, and finally the death of his most intimate friend, Hallam.

Of the three chapters, respectively headed "God," "Freedom," "Immortality," the last is by far the most important, and shows the most originality and research. The conclu-

sions that Prof. Sneath reaches in the first two chapters we really know in advance; the poet simply took the Kantian position assumed by so many thousands who combine intelligence with devout feeling, that God and Freedom are things forever beyond the possibility of knowledge, but in practical life are postulates on which all conduct and action are founded. In the discussion on immortality, however, Prof. Sneath goes into great detail, showing a surprisingly large number of separate arguments that Tennyson advanced in support of his hope for a future life. These arguments are all drawn from statements made in the poems themselves, and are summed up on pages 175 et seq. Some lovers of the poet may quarrel with this analytic method of extracting arguments from beautiful poetry, but the results obtained are so interesting that they throw new light on the intense eagerness with which Tennyson studied this most absorbing of all questions. The author believes that the poet went through four separate phases in his attitude toward immortality. On page 111, he says:

"The history of Tennyson's mental attitude toward the question of immortality may be divided into four periods. These are quite distinguishable, both logically and chronologically. The first, may be called the period of naïve, uncritical belief, in which the poet rests in the undisturbed confidence of an inherited faith. The second, is when he awakes from the sleep of dogmatism and experiences the first rude shocks of doubt. The third, finds him engaged in a reflective consideration of the question, endeavoring to establish his faith on a rational basis in the face of his own doubts and those of his age. The fourth, finds him emerging from this long period of rational consideration, into the enjoyment of a calm and serene faith."

While opinions may differ as to the sharpness of the lines that separate these positions one from the other, the value of this division is justified by the results reached in the summing up.

Wholly apart from Tennyson's undoubted poetic genius, Prof. Sneath evidently has immense respect for him as an original thinker and philosopher. Here we differ from him. In the preface to the *Memoir* by Hallam Tennyson, a book that on the whole we found rather marred by the son's too evident desire

to represent his father as a universal genius, as for example his calm statement that Tennyson and Oliver Wendell Holmes resembled each other "especially in their humour" (ii. 323), we find perhaps the best summary of the poet's real powers;—

"If I may venture to speak of his special influence over the world, my conviction is, that its main and enduring factors are his power of expression, the perfection of his workmanship, his strong common sense, the high purport of his life and work, his humility, and his open-hearted and helpful sympathy."

Nothing is here said about his purely intellectual strength; and the fact is, that Tennyson distinctly lacked originality and power of independent thought. For that very reason, he reflected his age in a way that few poets have done. He was the mouth-piece of the Victorian period, the true representative of nineteenth century ideas, thus fulfilling one of the most important functions of a poet. We cannot help regretting that Prof. Sneath, in his great admiration for Tennyson as a thinker, should have gone so far as to treat such specimens of his work as *The Promise of May*, and *Despair*, with respect—poems that are unworthy of Tennyson or of any one else. See pages 78, 96, 88. He quotes also with apparent approval such lines as these, which, whatever they are, are something else and worse than poetry:

"I toil beneath the curse,
But, knowing not the universe,
I fear to slide from bad to worse" (page 127).

But the very fact that Tennyson himself was neither original nor profound does not militate against the value of this inquiry into his philosophical attitude. For it is really an inquiry into the attitude not of Tennyson as an individual, but as a representative of his age, our age, and, therefore, has a double value.

A few minor errors may be noticed, which can be corrected in the second edition. "The Marquis of *Queensbury*," page 94: On page 113 we read that the *Poems by Two Brothers* was published when Tennyson was fifteen years old. He was really almost eighteen. On page 133, the quotation at the top of the page is marred by the omission of the word "so" before "utterly", which occurs in the original. The volume, *Locksley Hall Sixty Years after*, etc., was not dated 1887, as is

stated on page 168, but 1886; and the title of the volume is not given with absolute exactness. We hope also that in another edition the author will remodel the first sentence in the introduction, which is inelegant, one of the very few sentences in this book which has that fault; and we would suggest that on page 5 he omit the quotation from the Memoir, "Soon after his marriage he took to reading different systems of philosophy"—one of the many examples of Hallam Tennyson's unconscious humor.

All these, however, are blemishes of the minutest kind; we are sincerely grateful for a book that is so sound, so helpful, and so excellent in method.

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GERMAN GRAMMAR.

Lehrbuch der deutschen Sprache, by ARNOLD WERNER-SPANHOOF, Director of German Instruction in the High Schools of Washington, D. C. Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1899. 8vo, xi+301 pp.

In some respects this book is superior to any other work known to the reviewer, as an introduction to the study of German in American schools or colleges. Its rigid exclusion of everything not indispensable to the intelligent progress of the pupil renders possible an economy of space rarely attained in text-books. Nor is this economy secured at the expense of reasonable fullness of treatment, in case of subjects vitally important. The pedagogical skill of the author is shown in the choice of these themes and in the natural order in which they are developed. The most perplexing difficulties encountered by the student are explained first, and all others are left for later discussion in the order of their diminishing importance. Not, therefore, the nature of the subject-matter, but the needs of the acquiring mind determine the arrangement of the book. Another commendable feature is an abundance of well chosen and skilfully arranged exercises, which introduce the learner gradually to the spirit of the language through reading, asking and answering questions in German, and translating from English into German.